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ABSTRACT

THE FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF THIS DOCUMENT: Something good is happening in Indiana that may be a model for the nation. The Indiana Congress on Education, which convened for the first time last June, could be an unconventional but effective way to change public policy. Throughout the fall, we've been treated to demonstrations of the conventional way of changing policy. Typically, change begins when an event catalyzes public unrest. Take the publication last spring of A NATION AT RISK as the most potent recent example of the mobilization of public unrest. Suddenly education--particularly its shortcomings--became a major national concern. This unrest in turn mobilized the efforts of lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. Seven bills were thrown into the congressional hopper in the first two months after the release of the report. Federal legislators have pretty short attention spans, however. Most of those bills are already dead or dying; new concerns have wrested the spotlight away from the problems of the schools. In the statehouses, though, the concern about the "rising tide of mediocrity" that was prompted by the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education persists. Already, new laws exist that mandate stiffer graduation requirements and longer school days and years. More such laws are yet to come. This is the way such changes usually take place. Passing a problem--any problem--along to the legislature (at whatever level) tends to give the public the feeling that the matter has been dealt with. And yet legislators, though they are expected to represent their constituents' wishes, are not necessarily representative of all of their constituents. Too, the laws that are eventually enacted do not always address the original problem, nor do they guarantee that the public will have been fully involved in the change or even given much chance to become informed. The intent of the Indiana Congress on Education is entirely different. It aims to create an "informed interest" in education, according to Harley Bierce, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who directs the program. "We want to develop a feeling for what people think is important about Indiana schools and about where we want to go," he says. "Solutions grow out of more than facts; they grow out of an environment of spirit. The process is as important as the product." The process is important. Bierce and the other organizers of the Indiana Congress (including, for example, Thomas Binford, former chairman of the board of the Indiana National Bank) divided the state into 14 regions. From each region they invited community leaders to the first Congress; these leaders included schoolpeople, politicians, businesspeople, and students. The first meeting defined the task ahead (Dean Evans's article in this issue was one of the presentations at that June meeting). Now the regional committees are visiting at least four school districts in each region--interviewing teachers, administrators, students, and community leaders. In so doing, they will compile two pictures of schools: as they are and as Indiana citizens would like them to be. They will carry these impressions to another meeting of the Congress on Education early next year. What will come of all of this effort? At the very least, a feeling of community as regards education in Indiana, a network of new relationships between schools and informed, interested citizens. When you think about it, that's a lot. (Author)

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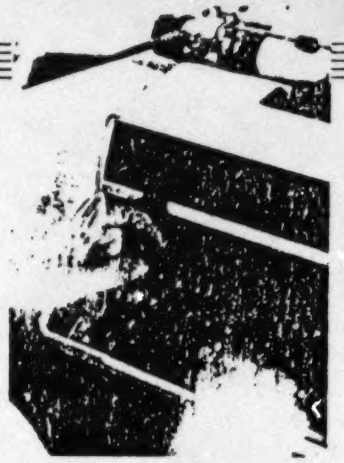

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

Creating 'Informed Interest' in Education

SOMETHING GOOD is happening in Indiana that may be a model for the nation. The Indiana Congress on Education, which convened for the first time last June, could be an unconventional but effective way to change public policy.

Throughout the fall, we've been treated to demonstrations of the conventional way of changing policy. Typically, change begins when an event catalyzes public unrest. Take the publication last spring of *A Nation at Risk* as the most potent recent example of the mobilization of public unrest. Suddenly education — particularly its shortcomings — became a major national concern.

This unrest in turn mobilized the efforts of lawmakers at both the state and federal levels. Seven bills were thrown into the congressional hopper in the first two months after the release of the report. Federal legislators have pretty short attention spans, however. Most of those bills are already dead or dying; new concerns have wrested the spotlight away from the problems

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